Youth-led learning: Local connections & global citizenship

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Social change brings new opportunities and challenges in young people’s lives and in the institutions that relate to them. As a result of globalisation processes and changing technologies, young people are increasingly engaging with the broader world beyond their local and national communities. New technologies also enable young people to engage in new ways at the local level. This has opened up opportunities for young people to communicate, learn, engage and receive information within and across geographic spaces. This raises important questions about how young people belong in their worlds, how they might relate to the lives of others and how they understand what it means to belong, locally and globally. It also raises questions about how young people are positioned within local and global information flows and connections, many of which are created by commercial interests or for political purposes (Schultz et al. Forthcoming).

In Australia young people are often presented with opportunities to learn about global issues through text-based curriculum programs delivered in schools. However these programs are often based on abstract ideas about different cultures and places and when presented to students who are not active participants in the process of generating the knowledge, can distance young people from each other rather than fostering understanding. Young people in developing countries also have limited opportunities to explore how young people in other countries live, beyond what they learn through the public media.

Youth researchers suggest that these conditions have contributed to an emerging paradox for young people in our region: social change, consumer markets and new technologies bring increasing opportunities for connection, and at the same time there are trends towards increased division through fear of diversity (Dunn et al 2004). The proliferation of information about other cultures and places can reinforce stereotypes and contribute to a fear of cultural difference. Young people in Australia are living in a context of increasing awareness and experience of cultural, national, international and religious diversity (ABS, 2007), which is often framed politically and through media by a climate fostering personal and national insecurity (Matthews, 2005).

At the same time, there is increasing interest in promoting civic engagement and citizenship amongst young people (Harris et al., 2007). Indeed, the term ‘global citizenship’ has been used to highlight the interrelationships between citizenship as a form of local and national connection, engagement and responsibility which defines young people’s sense of self and place and relationships and connections that transcend the local. In a global and regional context, this raises significant questions about how young people will engage with local and global issues, and about the tools and resources young people will need to equip them for new forms of participation and exchange (Wierenga, 2006a).

These ideas form the backdrop to our program of research. The research is designed to improve
understanding of the changing communication landscape for young people in a global context by focusing on how young Australians connect with young people in Indonesia through a learning program called Global Connections. By supporting and facilitating young people to develop their own ideas about global issues, asking their own questions, planning their own actions, initiatives and collaborations, the program aims to empower them to become active citizens, or agents of change, rather than passive recipients of processes or services within their communities.

The first chapter of this report provides a summary of recent literature on young people’s lives and the ways in which they enact citizenship in their own contexts. The second chapter describes key aspects of global learning and citizenship education. The third describes the establishment, implementation and key features of the Global Connections program, including its focus on youth-led processes. Chapter four introduces the research project “Youth-Led Learning: Local connections and global citizenship” which aims to provide a systematic evidence base for the design of sustainable, youth-led programs that promote Australian young people’s global learning.
Chapter I

Young people: social change, civic engagement & participation

This chapter provides a conceptual overview of the ideas that have influenced the design of the project and the analysis of the data. The research is underpinned by the recognition that young people’s lives are directly affected by changes in social processes (including technology). Next it explores current thinking about young people and participation and citizenship, emphasising the divergent meanings that these terms have. Lastly, this chapter discusses young people in the context of global issues. The chapter concludes with a series of dot points that highlight the implications of these ideas for the research project.

Young people & social change

Young people today live their lives differently to those of previous generations, with markedly different opportunities and choices (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Wyn and White 1997, 2004). The rights and responsibilities of young people are also rapidly changing especially in terms of employment, education and independence. At the same time, globalising processes have an increasing impact on young people’s lifestyle and livelihood, although these effects are uneven and little understood. There is an emerging research-based literature in Australia (Harris et al., 2007) but the research on young people in many other parts of the Asia-Pacific region is fragmented and sparse.

There is a convergence of opinion however that concerns about the economy, quality of life and sustainability span national and religious boundaries, and that more than ever before, young people’s lives and futures are inter-linked (Eckersley et al., 2006). Many of the complex issues facing individuals and communities are not anchored within national boundaries, but within regional and global settings. Young people in different places have common interests in managing uncertainty, in finding security, belonging, and in having a say in decisions affecting their lives and the places where they live (Mission Australia, 2007; Wyn, 2008).

The emergence of issues such as terrorism and global warming has seen a shift in the way young Australians perceive their sense of security and has brought global issues into their local context (Harris et al., 2007). Increasingly globalized consumer markets and new technologies bring new opportunities - even necessities - for connection (Burbules, 2004; Wyn, 2008).

Paradoxically, at the same time the attention focused on world events is leading to increasing separation by fear of difference (Matthews, 2005; Gilbourne, 2006), and divisions are being created across national and religious lines. In a global and regional context, these changes highlight both the opportunity and the need to be informed and equipped for new forms of participation and exchange (global citizenship).

Youth research reveals that young people’s participation in civic life is changing in response...
to changes in their social, economic (and physical) contexts (Harris et al. 2007; Norris 2004). These researchers draw on theorists of social change who argue that we live in an environment where social and political matters are increasingly decided at a global level. Bauman (2001) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have both commented on the loss of public faith in national politics as nation states experience a loss of control over matters significant to their citizens. In other words, in a world where decisions are made at a level above the nation state, politicians are perceived to be unable to make a difference. Because many young people believe that politicians do not have the capacity to solve issues, they feel that their interests cannot be represented through formal political processes. In response to this, they are finding new ways of engaging that fit with their more fragmented and individualised biographies (see Harris et al. 2007).

At a practical level, these developments raise questions about how to develop processes, resources, technologies, and sets of relationships that can effectively support young people’s active (local and global) civic engagement and participation.

Youth participation & civic engagement

The idea of youth participation in an international context is highly contested (Ratnam 2007). Some literature emphasises the view that young people in many countries lack engagement in and knowledge of civic and political processes, are not interested in issues that do not directly impact on them and are more likely to be watching television and ‘bowling alone’, than participating in collective activities in their community (Putnam 2000). In Australia, widespread concern was sparked by research reporting young people’s disengagement from formal democratic processes and suggesting that there was an emerging ‘civics deficit’ (Mellor, 2002).

Harris et al. (2007) have suggested that young people are more actively engaged in civic society than studies such as Mellor (2002) suggest. Their research shows that civic participation and engagement occurs at an everyday level, through involvement in local institutions (schools, sports clubs, youth clubs) and through involvement in local places and spaces (shopping malls, public transport routes). Other research shows that young people are concerned about issues that transcend their everyday lives (such as poverty in other communities and countries, environmental issues and political issues) but that they find it difficult to mobilise these concerns at a practical level (Eckersley et al. 2007).

Other recent research on young people’s civic engagement supports the view that young people’s apparent apathy may not be what it seems (Vromen, 2003). Vromen’s research highlights the importance of understanding the social and political context of young people’s participation and engagement in civic life. Vromen found that:

- Young people are disengaged because they feel alienated from traditional party politics;
- Young people are interested and passionate about social issues but are not given the opportunity to have a say;
- Young people are not disengaged, but their way of engaging is changing corresponding to their changing contexts and lives; and
- Adults are reluctant to recognise these new (untraditional) forms of engagement that young people are taking on (Vromen, 2003).

Manning and Ryan (2004) suggest that the conclusion that there is a ‘civics deficit’ may be confusing a lack of political engagement with a lack of interest in party politics:

It is possible that researchers who have concluded a ‘civics deficit’ may be conflating a lack of interest in party politics with a lack of political engagement. It would seem that the perception of citizenship either held by young people, taught in civics or constructed by these surveys is rather narrow (Manning and Ryan 2004: 20).

A recent UK study (Marsh et al. 2007) concluded that young people are alienated, rather than apathetic, and that their interests and concerns are rarely addressed within mainstream political institutions. They feel that politics is something that is done to them, not something they can take part in. Similarly, Henn et al (2002) found that contrary to the findings from many predominantly quantitative studies of political participation, young people in Britain are interested in political matters, and do support the democratic process. However, they feel a sense of anti-climax after voting for the first time, and are often critical of those who have been elected to positions of political power. Therefore what is mistaken as disengagement is less to do with apathy, and more to do with their scepticism about ‘formal’ politics in Britain (Henn et al. 2005).

Other researchers provide evidence that young people want to participate in civic life but are not given the opportunity to do so. For example Marsh et al.’s (2007) research revealed a picture of young people who feel excluded or marginalised from decision-making processes because of their age: “The young people felt they were rarely consulted or listened to, even in connection with issues that directly affect them” (ESRC 2004). Despite their feelings of alienation, young people were often highly articulate and acutely aware of the political implications of some issues, particularly
racism and housing issues. The findings suggest that many people would like a more participative form of democracy, especially at the local level. Similar feelings are reported by Australian young people who say they would like to make a difference if only someone would listen to them (Eckersley et al. 2007; Harris et al. 2007). Australian research by Fyfe shows that young people who are politically active experience considerable barriers to their participation (Fyfe, 2007).

There is also evidence that while young people are concerned about local and global issues and report that they want to contribute to a shared future, they do not believe they can personally make a difference (Eckersley et al. 2007; Harris et al. 2007). These findings emerge alongside suggestions that media reporting of local and global issues is fostering a sense of pessimism in young people who feel that the problem is too far beyond repair for them to be able to make any difference. Similar arguments suggest that much of the discourse around sustainable development within schools is premised on a negative outlook for the future. Nagel (2005) argues that this creates a sense of learned helplessness in young people who tend to take the view that ‘If it’s too broke, why fix it?’ (Nagel 2005: 75).

Another complexity is that the term ‘participation’ has a wide range of meanings. It can mean fairly tokenistic involvement (such as just being present at school) or can mean having full responsibility for decision-making. Drawing of work by Thompson and Holdsworth (2003), Wyn (2008) summarises five key meanings of engagement in school settings (see figure 1.1).

The different understandings of participation presented in Figure 1.1 show how participation and engagement by young people spans a continuum. At one end, minimal participation is expected of young people apart from being present in adult and institutionally sanctioned activities. At the other end, young people are in full control of activities and actions. In between there is a range of forms of participation, which involve structured processes through which adults can engage with young people’s concerns and priorities and assist in the development of youth-friendly processes that enable young people’s participation.

Our discussion of both civic engagement and youth participation highlights the importance of recognising that young people often find adult-centric issues and processes alienating. There is a difference between participatory initiatives that are adult-managed, and those in which children or young people devise and lead projects but have access to adults should they need assistance with anything (Douglas 2006). Ironically, young people’s participation and engagement in their communities is usually not recognised as such unless it occurs within parameters which are structured by adults (Wierenga 2003). Some argue that young people’s own concerns and rights ought to be the starting point for improving participation (Doesburg

| Figure 1.1: Student participation in schools: 5 key uses (adapted from Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **“Bums on seats”**                                             | Student participation is a measure of attendance (and non-attendance or truancy) and is used as a measure of access to schooling by different groups (e.g. girls, boys, low socio-economic groups, young people in rural areas) |
| Being physically present at school                              |                                                                                                  |
| **Engagement**                                                  | Student participation means active involvement in classroom activities, sports and in extra-curricular activities. Measures include levels of student satisfaction, active participation in school work and classroom work, a feeling of belonging and of being valued. This form of student participation is contrasted with alienation and is associated with inclusive curricula |
| Taking part in school activities                               |                                                                                                  |
| **Student voice**                                               | Student voice covers a wide range of processes, from being consulted by teachers, student councils (sometimes constituted through elections). In some schools young people’s role in decision-making extends to having a place on school committees. It can also take the form of elitist forms of student leadership |
| Involvement in school decision-making                           |                                                                                                  |
| **Active citizenship**                                          | Students are actively engaged in making decisions about matters that are central to the school (e.g. curriculum and school reform) as well as the relationship of the school to its community (e.g. neighbourhood or community strengthening and capacity building) |
| Student leadership                                              |                                                                                                  |
| **Political action**                                            | Students are organised around issues such as the environment, social justice or particular issues (local or national) and may take the form of joining (sanctioned or non-sanctioned) demonstrations or may occur online |
| Student activism                                                |                                                                                                  |
2000; Taylor and Smith 2000; Aveling 2001; Bessant, 2004). This is because young people’s engagement and participation is most effective when adults are open to participation in young people’s agendas and engagement with them to find solutions to problems.

Young people & global issues

While Australian and international literature provides evidence that a majority of young people are not interested in formal politics, it also suggests that they are interested in and care passionately about social issues (Aveling 2001; Harris et al., 2007). As Beresford and Phillips have suggested ‘a distinction needs to be drawn between interest in the political system and interest in political issues’ (Beresford and Phillips 1997: 16). For example, Aveling (2001) found that while most young people had a negative opinion of the government, they did have significant concerns about issues confronting Australian society. The issues most commonly identified were the environment, equity and specific issues relating to young people.

Eckersley’s (1999) research with 15-24 year olds found that while young people were easily able to identify problems confronting Australia, they were unsure about what they could do to help. This finding foreshadowed subsequent research (see above) that found young people feel excluded from formal decision making processes and many believe that their opinions and concerns are not welcome or wanted. The more recent research (Eckersley et al 2007) highlights the voices of young Australians who say they welcome opportunities to learn about the social issues which concern them, including the environment, inequality, prejudice and war. The young people also indicate that it is unusual to find inter-generational conversation spaces which address these big issues, in which they can hear others, feel respected, and be heard.

An extensive literature search reveals little research focusing specifically on young people’s knowledge and concerns about global issues. In 1998 the British government commissioned research into children’s knowledge of global issues (MORI 1998). This report indicated that while most young people felt they knew something about global issues, the majority felt that they needed to be taught more at school and that such an understanding was important to their future (MORI 1998).

Together, these findings highlight that changes in young people’s civic and political engagement are occurring against a backdrop of rapid social change. Contrary to being civicly disengaged, young people are engaging in new activities which fit with their changing life experiences. Furthermore, many express that they would like to be more engaged but feel unsure how to make a meaningful contribution. Despite this, there appears to be reluctance to move beyond traditional indicators of civic engagement and thus the ‘civics deficit’ view lives on and potentially stands as a barrier to establishing better opportunities for engagement.

Other research provides strong evidence that a majority of young people are concerned about national and global issues. However, there seems to be a significant gap in the literature about how young people see local and global problems as being connected. Also, among the extensive literature promoting the need to educate young people as global citizens (see for example Bourn et al. 2006; Garii 2000; Young and Commins 2002), there is little research asking young people directly about whether they see themselves as global citizens and what this means to them.

Conclusion

As far as informing the best way to engage young people in local and global issues, several recommendations can be drawn from the literature:

• Young people are interested in local and global issues, but prefer not to engage in formal politics. Many, young people view politicians as relatively useless at making a difference. They are more likely to engage through NGOs and informal organisations than with political parties in their local area or politically affiliated groups.

• Young people have considerable concerns about global issues and would like to make a difference – however: a) many are unsure how they can make a difference; b) many don’t believe it is possible to make a difference; and c) many do not feel as though their opinions on issues would be valued. This suggests that we need to give young people more opportunities to engage and inform them about already-existing opportunities (e.g. local youth reference groups, clubs). Secondly, we need to demonstrate that anyone can make a difference no matter how big or small their actions. This is tied to recognition about the interconnectedness of local and global issues. Finally, we need to give young people opportunities to have a say, listen to them and value their opinions.

• Young people feel that it is important to be aware of local and global issues and would like to learn more about these issues in school. They are more likely to engage in situations that are not adult-dominated and where they are not ‘preached to’ but rather have some agency in what they learn.
Chapter II

Partnerships for Global Learning

This chapter provides an overview of ideas that have influenced educational programs that seek to provide young people with opportunities to engage with and participate in learning about their world and the world of others. Different forms of global learning have historically been recognised as a valuable part of the school curriculum. At the same time, citizenship or civics education is being recognised as increasingly important in school settings as many see the need to prepare young people to become ‘global citizens’. The chapter provides a brief discussion of the emerging role of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in practically supporting global learning and citizenship education through a range of programs. It suggests that learning partnerships between NGOs and schools, universities and other institutions are a key element in the design of effective programs. While different terms are used across fields and organisations, such as global education, development education and global learning, for the purpose of clarity, we use the term global learning throughout the chapter.

Global Learning & Citizenship Education

Global learning has been recognised in Australia since the 1970s when international development organisations, including government agencies, became increasingly involved in developing educational programs for delivery in schools through mainstream curricula (for example, Amnesty International, Oxfam, World Vision). A recent international review of higher education argues that quality higher education should be concerned with preparing students - ethically and intellectually - for active global citizenship (Bourn et al, 2006).

AusAid, the Australian Government’s international aid agency argues that global learning ‘provides students with conceptual knowledge and skills, and helps to develop positive attitudes, values, and a willingness to participate actively in shaping the future’ (AusAid, 2006). It emphasizes the role of global learning in Australian Schools as a cross-curricular perspective that is concerned with understanding:

- international development issues and ways to reduce poverty;
- peace-building and resolving conflict;
- appreciating and valuing diverse cultures, languages and religions;
- promoting human rights and social justice; and
- working towards environmental sustainability.

At the same time, civics and citizenship education is gaining increasing recognition as an important aspect of the school curriculum. In the Victorian context, the introduction in 2005 of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) aimed to develop young people’s skills to enable them to participate effectively
in, and contribute to civic life. The standards seek to enhance students’ knowledge, skills and opportunities in areas relevant to civic life. The focus of learning is on political and legal systems and processes, rights and responsibilities as citizens, the nature of democratic values and principles, representative and accountable government, freedom of speech, equality before the law, social justice, and equality. Skill development is focused on fostering citizenship skills, exploring the development of values and dispositions to support citizenship, and the empowerment of informed decision making. VELS also aims to give students opportunities for participation such as active interaction with the community (VELS, 2005).

The standards are designed to teach [students] why citizens need a sense of personal identity within their own community and how they can contribute to local, national and global communities (VELS, 2005). In a world where people, environments, economics and politics are inextricably linked, and where dislocation and change are accelerating, a strong sense of personal identity developed through participation in communities is seen as a sound basis from which to connect to the world. Through Civics and Citizenship education, students develop an appreciation for the uniqueness and diversity of Australia’s multicultural society as well as the efforts of individuals and groups to achieve political rights and equality. To this end, students learn to value what it means to be an Australian and can explore Australia’s role in the global community. They consider human rights and social justice issues at local, national and global levels.

While critical thinking, questioning and participation in decision making are seen as important learning opportunities, many global learning and citizenship education programs continue to be based on ‘adult-created’ curriculum resources that teachers tend to deliver to students through traditional didactic approaches (teachers instructing students without an interactive dialogue). This approach contradicts the emerging international literature highlighting the benefits of experiential and relational learning, as well as the processes of informal education (Friere, 2004; Jarvis, 2001). However, the literature also identifies that some teachers are demanding flexible teaching approaches, for creating opportunities to learn. Such teachers value student participation, action-based learning, and less formal traditional learning methods compared with earlier generations (Mayer, 2006).

**Role of NGOs in global learning**

With increasing recognition of the importance of building youth civic participation and cohesion in Australia, new knowledge about effective models of practice in this area are needed. Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are continuing to position themselves as key contributors in the area of global learning.

Where participatory processes have become standardised in the international development work of NGOs, there is a convergence of opinion that these processes have significant benefits for participants and communities (Armstrong, 2008). This approach has synergies with the current discourse around the future direction for participatory global learning approaches in schools. Participation offers young people an opportunity to develop the skills to be able to express their views, interact with others positively, and be involved in decisions that impact on their lives. This process facilitates the development of skills in problem solving and critical reflection that become paramount to the self-determination of values and beliefs (Hart, 1992). Through genuine participation in a creative process, young people can gain confidence and self-esteem and become actors of change in their communities (Ericsson, 2002). The active participation of young people has also gained significant momentum following the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which highlighted the role of the child as a social actor.

Research on educational models and active participation provide a wider literature concerning power of experiential and relational learning and informal education processes. This research provides evidence for the claim that the most effective programming for young people comes from organisations that are willing for these approaches to be led and informed by young people (Kirby and Bryson 2002; Wierenga 2003). In this way young people’s interest guides the program’s focus and the dialogue can become part of learning.

The Global Connections Program which has been developed by Plan International Australia provides an example of how NGOs, in partnership with schools can make a significant contribution to the school curriculum. The Global Connections program involves the application of principles of experiential and relational learning to global learning, going beyond information provision, through dialogical approaches with young people, to youth-led learning. It is underpinned by the assumption that a Government and publicly funded NGO should be accountable in terms of its educational agenda and social impact, beyond its traditional role of raising revenue for the development of programs with partners in developing countries. Plan’s work through the Global Connections program is about reaching beyond the provision of educational materials and products, to exploring the processes of global learning. An important emphasis of the program in this regard is enabling the young people’s authentic participation, and practically supporting students’ development of local and global citizenship skills.
Learning partnerships

Schools are increasingly expected to develop stronger links with communities, including becoming community hubs (or core social centres) within their immediate geographical area. At the same time, schools are expected to provide students with opportunities to learn about and respond to global issues. Local and global links are valued as they can increase opportunities for learning and broaden the scope of resources available to communities (and schools).

The experience of implementing the Global Connections project over the last three years has shown that there is significant interest among Australian teachers to actively incorporate innovative ways of learning that involve partnerships with communities and NGOs. As well as students’ active learning about pressing social issues, and discussing topics that link into curriculum (e.g. SOSE, Geography, Languages), teachers have indicated interest in exploring the possibilities for their own learning within the context of partnerships.

There is now a significant body of evidence demonstrating positive learning outcomes and community change created through effective partnerships between schools and outside interests. Such partnerships include: schools and communities (Kilpatrick et al. 2003), schools and informal education (Guevara 1997, 2005), schools and young people (Holdsworth et al. 2003; Wierenga 2003), and schools and universities (Winter et al. 2006). Policy papers and reports document the social capital oriented outcomes and potential outcomes of effective partnerships (e.g. Catholic Education Office and VicHealth 2002; Thomas 2004; Wilson 2002). Some studies have identified intangible outcomes such as psychosocial wellbeing of participants who gain a sense of pride, satisfaction and ownership (e.g. Veel 2003). However, most of the measured outcomes are weighted toward schools and students, with relatively little documentation on community-oriented outcomes such as strengthening of community resilience and capacity building of community (Guevara 2006).

Several criteria have been identified as essential to good partnerships. These include having a shared vision; ensuring processes for attracting and distributing resources, resolving ownership issues; implementing decision-making processes; and ensuring a matched level of community empowerment and leadership (Kilpatrick et al. 2002). A number of scholars have identified models and ways to maximize the relationships between partners (Guevara 2006; Kilpatrick et al. 2003; Pearson and Tilbury 2007; Uzzell...
Kilpatrick et al (2003) identified 12 characteristics of a successful school-community partnership and identified indicators of the level of maturity of school-community partnerships. Further, a multi-stakeholder partnership model was developed by Tilbury et al (2005) which identifies the importance of sharing new knowledge, goals and resources towards achieving a shared vision by different stakeholders.

Based on current projects in Melbourne focusing on education and sustainability, Guevara (2006) has proposed a model (see Figure 2.1) which advocates for re-conceptualization of school-community partnerships, drawing from the characteristics of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2005). Similar elements of partnerships were identified in the evaluation of the Global Connections pilot program (Wierenga 2006). Each group or partner moving towards its own learning goals can ensure the sustainability of the program.

While group or partner can function within separate spheres of learning, Guevara et al. (2007) highlights that it is the overlap of these spheres (or through learning partnerships) that new learning and knowledge is most productive. However, learning partnerships do not happen naturally. Several barriers to effective partnerships have been identified (Wierenga et al 2003; Wierenga 2005; Sanders 2001) and Uzzell (1999) has advocated for a model of dialogue to overcome barriers to cooperation.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the different spheres of learning involved in the Global Connections program. In addition to undertaking systematic conceptual enquiry about enabling tools for global citizenship and the model for NGO involvement, this project will explore, in detail, the key elements and processes involved in facilitating effective learning partnerships.

Conclusion

The past decade has seen significant developments and innovations in global learning in schools. The Victorian Essential Learning Standards outline an important rationale for teaching global learning and citizenship education however, it appears that many schools are challenged when attempting to move outside traditional teaching methods towards more participatory approaches.

The evidence suggests that global learning in practice can be significantly enhanced through partnerships between schools and organizations such as NGOs. Partnerships with NGOs can provide the expertise and connections which enable schools to develop innovative programs that enable young people to learn about global issues and become active citizens in the community. However, it is important to remember that partnerships between schools and NGOs involve complex processes for their success. The Global Connections program provides an opportunity to put into practice what has been learned about partnerships from previous studies. The Youth-led learning program of research will generate new knowledge to inform and encourage future practice.

Figure 2.2: Spheres of learning in the Global Connections program (adapted from Guevara et al 2007)
Chapter III

The Global Connections Program

About Plan

Plan in Australia is part of Plan International, one of the world’s largest community development organisations committed to ending child poverty. Plan works with children, their families and communities in 49 countries in Asia, Africa and Central and South America. Plan helps communities to help themselves, so that children have opportunities to develop into healthy, educated adults. Their child centred community development approach involves children as equal partners in changing their future. In this way, children are not passive recipients of compassion but agents of change in their own community development. Plan recognises that making real improvements in children’s lives means working both locally and globally on the underlying causes of poverty in the developing world. Plan has no religious or political affiliations, and respects and celebrates people’s right to cultural diversity and autonomy.

Plan's desired approach to global learning is not to teach young people about global issues, but to connect them with other young people who are experiencing those issues. As a result, it is intended that children will undergo more of a personal transformative experience than if they were the passive recipients of information.

Global Connections

As part of Plan’s youth participation strategy, the Global Connections Program commenced in 2005 and is jointly managed by Plan in Australia and Indonesia, in partnership with RMIT University, and with evaluation support provided by the Australian Youth Research Centre (AYRC). In the three years that the program has been running, it has brought together more than 200 children from six Australian schools and five groups in Indonesia with help from 22 university students and 12 translators.

The program pairs groups of school students, student facilitators and teachers in Australia with groups of young people and facilitators in Indonesia. Indonesian groups are facilitated by Plan staff and university students and Australian groups are facilitated by students from a range of relevant subjects at a number of Melbourne based universities, including RMIT. Groups exchange communication pieces (written, artwork or video/multi-media) several times during the year. These communication pieces explore and highlight tensions and possibilities that face young people in contemporary Australia and in Indonesia, particularly in relation to factors that separate and factors that connect social diversity and global citizenship.

The program gives children and young people in developed and developing countries an opportunity to exchange their own ideas, their own concerns and priorities and develop solutions about their development. The opportunity to communicate directly in mutual two-way dialogue breaks down many prevailing myths about a child’s life in an economically poor nation (Bolotin 2004).

A second important component of the program is that it is youth-led. Its youth-led focus is ensured through two key components: the use of youth facilitators who co-ordinate the facilitation of the program and the
Figure 3.1: Global connections is an opportunity to develop awareness and connections by exchanging communication pieces

Figure 3.2: The processes that guide communication in the Global Connections Program

Outcomes so far

For each year that the program has been running it has undergone a comprehensive evaluation with a range of findings informing the refinement of the program for the consecutive year (Wierenga, 2006; Ratnam, 2007; Sowerby, forthcoming).

An overview of the program reveals that over time the participants’ communications and the dialogue generated by them develop increasing depth, enabling young people to understand through their own inquiry how personal issues (e.g. drugs, young offending, domestic violence and gender inequity) can be related to wider issues and how global issues (e.g. conflict, terrorism, poverty, petrol shortages and rising prices) have a personal dimension (Wierenga 2006). The insights gained from this process enable both groups of young people to see how others can be or are ‘like me’ and to formulate personal responses to wider issues, including shaping agendas for their own learning and eventually how they each could respond to global issues or global citizenship.

The outcomes for the young people have been incredibly varied, including increased self-esteem, vocational and personal skill building, increased awareness of global citizenship and avenues for taking action, and decreases in negative stereotypes and stigmatisation within both Indonesian and Australian Communities.
The objectives of the Global Connections program are as follows:

- **Form personal bonds and a sense of global connection** with their peers overseas by mutually sharing experiences, stories, pictures, dreams, ideas, films, concerns and priorities with each other.

- **Increase their understanding of issues** facing young people in a different community overseas.

- **Develop invaluable skills**, such as leadership, expression and communication (especially visual literacy), project planning and implementation.

- **Raise awareness** about the lives and experiences and issues of young people from around the world in their own community.

- **Develop common agendas**, joint solutions and collaborations for issues of concern with young people overseas.

- **Enable Plan to learn more about young people’s ideas**, visions and needs and integrate them into the process, operations and philosophy of Plan’s work, and to also build the capacity of Plan to actively engage and listen to young people.

The university students, as facilitators, learn about youth participation and promoting global learning through a student-led process (Ratnam, 2007a, 2007b). Further the youth-led global learning process appears to meet the needs of learners to a greater extent than global learning that is based on the understandings, perceptions and experiences of adults (Sowerby 2007).

Overall, evaluation of the program thus far reveals that global learning can go well beyond provision of information, towards dialogical processes of learning that are led by young people. Participants are able to develop skills in problem identification, action planning and project implementation through direct experience.

Indonesian participants have reported increased self-esteem, making friends from another country. As one Indonesian participant said:

I got a lot of motivation to always strive for a sense of solidarity between one person and another, it’s true that we are different but in friendships, it doesn’t matter if we are rich or poor (we don’t discriminate).

Participants also gain practical skills such as movie making and learning, English and computer skills as beneficial outcomes of their participation in the project. The value of the program for these participants was further enhanced with the opportunity to discuss issues of importance in their lives in the course of completing their communication pieces. For instance, participants in the PAMORS group (a youth group in Runkut Surabaya) recounted that the opportunity to talk about ‘dating’ (as it was translated) was helpful in learning more and clarifying confusion they experienced about the issue. The title of dating actually represented a discussion about domestic abuse, physical and emotional abuse in relationships and gender inequity for Indonesian participants and for their Australian peers, positive and negative impacts of dating at a young age.

The program has been especially important to the participants from the LAPAS group – a juvenile justice centre for young boys – where they have a desire to prevent or remove the negative stigma which is continually applied to them as detainees and to develop pride in their personal achievements. The young people in these groups repeatedly state ‘to make friends and to learn English’ as a reason for being part of the project, and this is especially important as the program gives them the opportunity to communicate with those outside the detention centre. These connections are all the more important because many of these young people have few visits by parents (sometimes only twice a year because of limited income and distance from home) or the fact that some youth are wards of the state and have no visitors outside their work with Plan. This feedback suggests this program reinforces citizenship at the level of intrinsic value and personhood.

Participation in the program is also about claiming active roles as citizens, building on self-esteem and the notion of self pride. One ex-detainee has used his certificate of participation to secure employment as a baker and another enjoyed the program so much he wanted to return after being released to continue his participation. Plan Indonesia now aims to train some of these young people as co-facilitators of the program.

The program has received positive media coverage in Indonesia, helping to change the way the young people are viewed by the general public. This positive promotion of the program assists in reducing the stigma attached to their current detention and better allows them to explore their citizenship rights once released.

In Australia, the observation of ‘change’ in participants has also been significant. Participants commented that they ‘now looked at things differently’ or thought of issues such as ‘terrorism’ differently from what was often reported. Such discussion during sessions...
gave facilitators a chance to address stereotypes of poverty, religion and ethnicity held by participants. This highlights the unique position of the program to discuss current issues using personal examples (e.g. knowing young people in Indonesia) to explore issues that were being canvassed by popular media and that were influencing the opinions of young people. In the 2005 program there was much discussion about the Bali bombings and how this had affected both Indonesian and Australian youth, including their perceptions of each other.

Engagement has heightened some participants' awareness of their own roles in responding to social issues. Participants have reported that the program 'made me feel like I take a lot of things for granted in my day to day life' and that 'together we can make a difference' where as previously they felt that the issues were too big and their actions would be insignificant. One said: 'It made me understand what is going on in this world' and another pointed out 'we've done much more than raise money, we have raised awareness' (note that the Global Connections program does not raise money). Another participant reflected that the Global Connections program was:

an opportunity to find out about other countries and how other people learn and it sort of teaches us a new type of literacy, not just Math, not just English or Science, it’s people skills.

University student facilitators in Australia believed that they came away with a different frame of mind regarding the development and role of young people in Australia. They stated that it was powerful to hear how their participation in the Global Connections Program had motivated people, increased their self confidence and awareness:

I felt that participants had emerged from the program with a deeper appreciation of the lives of different cultures, with a personal experience from which to base future thinking about such issues on (Youth Facilitator 2006).

Through the Global Connections Program participants are supported to take action on issues of concern raised in their communication pieces and dialogue. To date actions have included the PAMORS group in Indonesia producing a movie highlighting the issues of concern raised during the dating communications (such as gender inequity and domestic violence) and presenting it in a public forum. Young people at Albert Park Secondary College used their allocated ‘action’ time of the program to claim their local citizenship and partake in a petition against the closure of their school.

Whilst there have been a number of challenges to the program, they have been in the majority, process orientated. There have been several challenges relating to the timing of communication pieces and negotiating time for the program in a structured school environment. Other challenges include sustainability within the detention centre and facilitating participant requests for one to one communication.

Such a vision goes further than teaching young people about global issues, by connecting them directly with the issues through young people who are experiencing them first hand, thus providing an opportunity to learn through a personal and interactive experience. It provides opportunities for joint problem solving and community actions between groups. At the same time they are building lasting connections with each other (Plan Australia 2008). Through involvement in this project, the young people are expected to develop invaluable leadership, communication and team work skills as well as an enhanced capacity to create positive social change on issues that matter to them and their peers. The quotes on the following page capture the experience of some participants.

Conclusion

The Global Connections program is informed by a well-defined approach that emphasises the benefits to young people of learning about local and global processes and issues through direct communication with each other across national and cultural boundaries. Students are supported by their teachers and young facilitators to develop their own communications with their counterparts internationally. In this sense, the program is led by young people.

Through ongoing evaluation, Global Connections has begun to identify elements in the program that work well and areas for improvement, but has yet to put in place a systematic process for capturing data about what young people learn, about the processes that enhance that learning and about the nature of partnership between schools and Plan. These are the issues that are taken up in the research.
Searching for people who care, who’re really willing to develop (the kids) to be useful people who can be models for their friends even though (we are) in jail, we can still be creative.

(Indonesian Participant 2005)

I went through quite a lot of changes while in the Global Connections Program. Previously, I thought I wasn’t a good person (because I went to jail), and now I value myself.

(Indonesian Participant 2007)

My most significant change from being involved with Global Connections was that I got to learn about the lifestyle in Indonesia and also become more aware of what it is like around the world and also learning about the people in the Global Connections class and why they wanted to join and the ways we could make a difference in the world by being a “Global citizen”.

(Australian participant 2007)

I have experienced a few significant changes from becoming more globally aware to getting to know and work with people I wouldn’t normally work with. When I first began taking part in the Global Connections Program I had a brief idea of the few opportunities available to people in countries such as Indonesia. Now my knowledge has been broadened immensely. I have even gained a better knowledge of Australia.

(Australian participant 2007)
Chapter IV

The Research

The Global Connections Program has been designed to contribute to the capacity for young people in Australia and in developing countries to develop understandings and knowledge that will enable them to participate as both global and local citizens. The Youth-led learning project is designed to provide a robust conceptual frame to inform the ongoing development of this program and to implement research that will inform the future development of the Global Connections Program. Funding through the Australian Research Council’s Linkage Grant program has enabled Plan, RMIT University and The University of Melbourne to collaborate in conducting research on the Global Connections Program with the aim of improving youth-led global learning. The research will provide a systematic evidence base for the design of sustainable, youth-led programs that promote Australian young people’s global learning.

Aims and key themes

The research aims to:

1. **Investigate** with young people, the tensions and possibilities between constructing young people’s individual lives, and social participation in their communities and worlds (with a critical focus on concepts of individualization, civic engagement, active citizenship, and global citizenship).

2. **Articulate** a model of Non Government Organisation (NGO) involvement in developing young people’s awareness and skills to effect positive social change.

3. **Develop** conceptual understandings, resources and practical tools for effective and sustainable learning partnerships (between community, school, NGO, University partnerships which support youth-led innovation and learning).

These research aims are operationalised through the following themes and questions:

1. **Civic engagement, active citizenship, global citizenship:**
   - What is the nature of young Australians’ knowledge and connections with Asia? (and vice versa);
   - What do young people learn about others and themselves through the ‘Global Connections’ project?; and
   - How does the knowledge gained and connections developed through the ‘Global Connections’ program contribute to global citizenship education?

2. **Model of youth led-learning facilitated by an international non government organisation:**
   - What processes facilitate deep engagement by young Australians with young people in resource-poor contexts in Asia?
   - What processes facilitate reflective learning, the removal of stereotypes or prejudice?

3. **Effective, sustainable partnerships between schools, NGOs and universities to facilitate youth-led learning:**
   - What processes, roles and structures in the partner organisations are associated with effective outcomes?
   - What processes, roles and structures in the partner organisations enable young people to play a leadership role?
Approach & research design

The research is designed to generate data to address these questions through the use of a methodology informed by an action research approach, (Wadsworth, 2006) principles of partnership with relevant organisations and the use of innovative participatory research techniques (Most Significant Change technique) as well as the use of more traditional survey and interview tools.

Using the Most Significant Change technique, or MSC (Dart & Davies, 2003) different ‘circles’ of data are generated by all participants: young people, university facilitators, teachers and the Plan personnel, as they articulate their stories of the most significant changes that have affected them as a result of their involvement in the Global Connections program. Individual stories are shared and through a participatory selection process, a limited number of key stories are selected for further reflection and documentation. This technique provides a structure within which all participants are positioned as co-researchers, sharing and also assisting in the reflection on (and analysis of) the emerging data on social issues, civic engagement and social action. This process will generate documentary data (texts and visual representations) for analysis. Plan will organize translation of the material.

The key purpose of MSC is facilitating program development. This is facilitated by focusing the direction of work towards valued directions and away from less valued directions. MSC has frequently been used to evaluate international development programs. Developed to meet some of the challenges associated with evaluating a complex, participatory rural development program in Bangladesh (Davies 1996), it is now used by many international development organisations, and offers a significant departure from quantitative measures. Rather than applying pre-determined quantitative indicators, MSC involves regular collection of and participatory interpretation of ‘stories’ about change allowing all program stakeholders to focus their attention on program impact and the ownership of the information derived from the process.

Alongside the MSC process, the research will involve a survey of young people at the outset of the program, and interviews with selected individuals in each of the participating groups. The use of these research tools enables the researchers to gather base-line data on young people’s understandings of citizenship both locally and internationally and to gather quality, in-depth data about a) young people and b) organisational and learning processes that can contribute to concept building and to developing a model of practice.

Research participants

The research participants involve three different groups:

1. Young school-aged people: Two cohorts of school aged young people (in Australia and Indonesia) will be involved (in 2008 and 2009).
2. Undergraduates: Ten university students who are facilitators and ten Indonesian facilitators are involved in each year.
3. Staff in the partner organisations, consisting of school teachers and Plan International staff.

Sample & sampling issues

The selection of Australian schools is based on the commitment they can offer to the project. They include schools in affluent, mid-income and lower income areas. The selection of Indonesian groups is informed by Plan Indonesia, targeting areas where the project has potential to build on and value-add the local program activity. Annual surveys will sample the entire participant population. Across the two years, the young participants will include up to 300 school aged youth (15 – 17) in Australia and up to 60 in Indonesia. Interviews will be conducted with a sample of 30 young people in Australia and 30 in Indonesia (15 in each year). While the sampling aims as much as possible to achieve a balance of gender, race and ethnicity, the selection of students for interviewing reflects purposive sampling to ensure that a diverse range of views is recorded (for example, along continua from engaged/disengaged with school, engaged/disengaged with community). Beyond the project’s learning cycle, the use of two cohorts of young people (2008 and 2009) also contributes to ‘interpretive sufficiency’. Comparison of the data across the two years will enable a level of saturation of themes and will provide some protection against the probability that events influencing one of the programs in any one year are unusual. The sample will also include teachers, facilitators and Plan staff who have been involved in the project.

Surveys

The 300 participating secondary school students in Australia and 60 young people in Indonesia will be surveyed to generate baseline and outcome data on their experiences and understandings of global citizenship, of their knowledge about Indonesian / Australian youth, and their sense of themselves in relation to young people in poorly-resourced or differently-resourced countries. This data will provide a point of reference for the analysis of the data generated by Most Significant Change process.
Interviews

Interviews will be carried out with a purposive sample of 15 young people each year in each country who are participating in the program (several times in one year) and with students from the previous program. The interviews will be structured around questions about learning, relationships, priorities and outcomes, and will augment the Most Significant Change data on these topics. The interviews are intended to enhance the participatory research element, enabling the young people to identify what is of importance to them. Interviews will also be conducted with teachers, facilitators and Plan staff in each country, to obtain data about the nature of the partnerships and their experiences of the structures and roles in the program. Plan will organize translation.

Analysis

Analysis of open responses and transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews would be supported through the use of NVivo qualitative software. Analysis will lead to preparation and distribution of short ‘participant reports’, which will keep the research participants informed about the key findings each year. Documentary analysis of materials produced by young people and facilitators (communication pieces, facilitator journals, essays) will be conducted from a critical discourse analysis perspective. The surveys will be analysed using SPSS.

Conclusion

The research project is being undertaken as a partnership involving key staff from Plan International Australia and a research team consisting of researchers and postgraduate students at The University of Melbourne and RMIT University. The partnership brings together the expertise required to develop and extend our knowledge of global learning, civic participation and engagement by young people in Australia and Indonesia. The relevance of this program is underpinned by the increasing significance of global issues to young people’s lives and by the direct impact that social change has on young people in both countries. The research will generate new knowledge about the processes and outcomes of this program and will produce a model of NGO involvement in global learning programs.

Above: An illustration from a letter from one of the Indonesian participants in 2007

Aveling, N. (2001) “Smarter than we’re given credit for”: Youth perspectives on politics, social issues and personal freedoms; Victoria: Australian Association for Research in Education.


UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE,
AUSTRALIAN YOUTH RESEARCH CENTRE

Since 1988 the Youth Research Centre has undertaken research on and with young people to promote approaches and policies which contribute to an understanding of the full range of life experiences of young people and which support young people's capacities to exercise control over their lives. The Centre's research programs cover local, national and international issues and facilitate collaborative research links across different sectors, including education, health, youth work and juvenile justice.

The staff at the Centre are experienced in the design and implementation of research involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches and in the delivery of high quality professional learning.

The Centre welcomes inquiries from research higher degree students and contributes to undergraduate and masters coursework programs in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and in the University.

RMIT, SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES,
SOCIAL SCIENCE & PLANNING

The School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning teaching and research programs cover a broad range of humanities and social science disciplines. Some of the key areas of teaching and research include: community development, criminology, cultural studies, environment, history, international relations and development, language studies and sociology.

PLAN AUSTRALIA

Plan in Australia is a not for profit change agent for the sake of children. We work at the grass roots level in the developing world to empower communities to overcome poverty, so that children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We encourage children to express their views and be actively involved in improving their communities. Together with our supporters, Plan is a catalyst for change, free from political and religious agendas, existing only for the sake of children. Plan works in over 45 developing countries. We unite, empower and inspire people around the globe to champion every child's right to grow up healthy, safe and educated.